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It rests, therefore, with those who feel called in the Providence of God to literary pursuits, to press into the wide and unexplored fields which this venerable language, with its immense literature, presents to an earnest explorer. France has long gloried in men whose knowledge of Chinese has been both extensive and thorough; and now, year by year, her scholars are making valuable contributions to the general fund of human knowledge.

The citizens of our Republic abroad are happy to see the commencement of a higher standard of literary attainment in our country. We are proud to mention the names of many of our countrymen who are known wherever there are scholars: we are proud to hear from men of other lands the respectful mention of not a few eminent for science and literature. We trust that this number may be continually swelled. The pursuit of wealth has drawn down to the merely material too many a soul capable of better things. Many an illustrious example has shown that even deep poverty is no bar to the pursuit of learning. It will be a happy day, when even worldly wisdom shall have charms enough to attract men away from all the pleasures of wealth or political honors.

The new relations of China to the nations of the West seem to demand that something more should be undertaken, by those who are so extensively engaged both in missionary and mercantile operations with that land, to cultivate an acquaintance with the language and literature of China. The language must be attractive to the philologist and the grammarian, while the literature, though meager and feeble in comparison with that of Europe, ancient and modern, is yet vast, and not devoid of many elements of attraction to one who loves to trace the workings of the human mind under differing conditions of development and progress.

Shanghai, Aug. 28th, 1858.

III. ON THE NATURAL LIMITS OF ANCIENT ORIENTAL HISTORY.

BY PROF. JAMES MOFFAT, D. D.

Presented to the Society Oct. 27, 1859.

The field of Ancient Oriental History has hitherto, so far as I know, been treated as if possessed of no natural boundaries in either time or place. Conventional limits have been assigned to it, merely because, for the convenience of both writer and reader, the Orient must be assumed to stop somewhere, and the ancient to stop somewhere.

Contrary to this prevailing notion, I find an epoch of history most properly styled Ancient Oriental, which is by nature singularly circumscribed, both chronologically and ethnologically, as well as by the relations and boundaries of its geography.

That epoch of civilization which flourished between the Deluge and the fifth century before Christ was both unique and harmonious in its style, and rounded and complete in its duration, passing through a natural maturity and decline.

The region in which it flourished has well defined natural boundaries : on the west, the great African desert, the Mediterranean, Ægean, Hellespont, Propontis, and Bosphorus ; on the north, the Black Sea, the range of the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and the deserts of Tartary ; on the east, the Ala Tagh mountains, the Hindu Kush and Himalaya range, as far as the Sutlej, and thence, the sandy desert on the east of that river and of the Indus, to the sea ; and on the south, the Arabian Sea, the gulf of Aden, and the southern borders of Abyssinia. It is also symmetrical within itself, all its parts holding such relations as the parts of one body hold to that body and to one another. Its central element is a broad belt of highlands, running from north-west to south-east, beginning on the shores of the Ægean Sea, occupying in its breadth the whole peninsula of Asia Minor, and then of Armenia and Mesopotamia, and successively extending over Assyria, Persia, Cabul, and Gedrosia, until it terminates near the western bank of the Indus. On either side of this great belt of hill country lies a vast plain, bounded externally by the valley of a large and navigable river, and partly intersected by two inland seas. On the south-eastern side, the plain is that which comprehends the deserts of Arabia and the Nile valley, and the two seas which intersect it are the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The north-eastern plain is that which contains the deserts of Turkomania, and the seas which intersect it are the Caspian and Aral.

Into each of these plains runs a great and fertilizing system of rivers, connecting it with the central highlands. On the south-west, that system consists of the Euphrates and Tigris, with their tributaries, running down from the highest group of mountains in the western highlands ; on the north-east it is that of the Oxus and Jaxartes, with their tributaries, which gather their waters from the highest summits of the eastern highlands. The features of the north-eastern plain face southward, and those of the south-western, in view of the same particulars, in the main, face northward.

The whole region is thus at once symmetrical and varied, bound together by great natural bands : it is one.

Both on the east and on the west, its southern side rests upon the valley of a great river, which feeds a rich belt of arable land through a desert to the sea. On the east, the Indus—on the west, the Nile, present a remarkable similarity in the nature of their course, their magnitude, the countries through which they flow, and the antiquity of human history connected with them.

Thus limited by natural boundaries on every side, and symmetrical within itself, this happy region was also possessed of great diversity of parts. It comprehends every variety of climate belonging to the temperate zone, and, with the exception of some mountain tops, and of Ethiopia and southern Arabia, is spared all the extremities which lie beyond that zone.

It is this region which was the oldest historical abode of all three historical branches of mankind : so far as history knows, it was their primitive home. Within its bounds they cultivated and ripened their first epoch of civilization, and saw its decline. That epoch began with the supremacy of the sons of Ham, and for more than fifteen hundred years

was under their control. It received a new impulse and loftier purpose from the great increase and energy of the sons of Shem, and from the religious reformation effected by their means ; and it was both finally united, and brought to its close, by the first great empire of the Japhetic race. The Hamitic nations, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sidon, were the leaders of the epoch, who gave shape and general bearing to its character from beginning to end. In the latter part of their history they found reformers, rivals, and correctives, but not masters, in the Hebrews, Arabians, and Assyrians ; and the semi-barbarous Persians, in overrunning and subduing, contracted only the external gloss of the refinement, which died in their grasp. Though the Japhetic race first rose to dominion within that region, it was elsewhere that they were destined to unfold a civilization proper to themselves.

In the history of that epoch are to be found all the varieties of civilization which have their birth in the material habitation of man. All that refinement which is consistent with migratory life is illustrated in the story of the Hebrew patriarchs ; Egypt carried to the very last results the genuine order of agricultural society ; and Sidon, with her colonies, gave the earliest example of the more liberal culture which springs from commerce ; while every inferior degree of these styles was to be found scattered among the table lands, the valleys, and the seacoasts of that most diversified yet harmonious country.

Moreover, when we consider its linguistic and ethnological relations—the fact that nations outside of its borders refer their origin to it—that physiologically they hold relations to those parts of it nearest to them—that its languages refer themselves to a common centre, and stand as the types of the linguistic systems beyond its bounds—that the language, for example, of its central highlands, has thrown out descendants to both east and west, which to this day recognize their affinity ; while that of its southwestern plain has as clearly perpetuated itself into Africa, as that of its northeastern plain opens out to the geographical conditions of the Turanian or sporadic groups of the north of Asia and Europe—it seems to me that the history of that region and epoch assumes not only a roundness and unity, but also a magnitude of importance, hardly equalled in any subsequent time. Its historical unity stands out the more prominently that its prosperity, though the first to flourish and the first to fade, has never yet been restored.

To this epoch of civilization the Persians stood as the Romans to that of Hellenic growth. They gave one master to its whole domain. And as the decay of the Roman empire was to the Hellenic epoch, so was the decay of the Persian to the Oriental.

But the final blow was given by the campaigns of Alexander. Though the head of a great civilized power, and destined to diffuse the civilization of which he was the champion, he came upon the last days of ancient Orientalism as the Goth upon declining Rome. Though Hellenism did much good in the east, and was widely diffused, it never took root there. The dark ages of the Oriental world, so far as pertains to the original seat of its refinement, have seen no dawn ; the learning of its antiquity no revival.

From looking at the subject in the light thus briefly indicated, and it is not necessary to detain the Society with more, I am impressed with the conviction that Ancient Oriental history has yet to be written. The very conception of its unity—or of the fact that it has such intrinsic and proper unity—has not appeared in any work that I have seen.

Princeton, N. J., Feb., 1859.

IV. EXTRACTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE.

1. From a letter of Rev. Justin Perkins, D. D., of Orûmiah.

Oroomiah, July 9th, 1857.

.... M. Jabá, the Russian Consul at Erzroom, showed our friend a manuscript Dictionary in French, Turkish, and Koordish, which he had prepared by the direction of his Government, and which is soon to be published at St. Petersburg. Also, a Grammar, Chrestomathy, and Dialogues, in the same languages. The Koordish is that spoken in the region of Van and Bayazeed. You are aware that the dialects of Koordish are very numerous. The Rev. Samuel A. Rhea, our esteemed missionary in Koordistan, is paying some attention to the Hakkary Koordish, spoken in the region of his residence.

We have sometimes speculated on the etymology of the name of our province, *Oroomiah*. It may be, I think, composed of **ՀԱՅ** ‘land,’ and **ՀԱՅՈՒԹ** ‘Rome;’ i. e., ‘land of the Romans,’ or belonging to Rome under the Byzantine rule—the same in fact as Erzroom, except that the latter takes the Arabic prefix, instead of the Syriac. The Nestorians say that it means ‘land of water,’ i. e., ‘well-watered district,’ from **ՀԱՅ** and **ՋԱ**: this accords well with the actual state of the country....

2. From a letter of Prof. C. J. Tornberg, of the University of Lund.

Lund, Sweden, July 19th, 1857.

.... You will perhaps be interested to learn that I am now preparing three new volumes (viii–x) of Ibn el-Athir, so that almost the half, and the more interesting half, of the great chronicle (the years 295–628 of the Hejira) will be in the hands of the learned world. A stay at Paris during the past year has placed me in possession of materials, not only for this new portion, but also for the revision of the text already published. A Latin version will accompany the whole. I hope that a volume may be ready to appear during the course of next year. If life and health are granted me, it is my design to take up the first sections also of this important work. I regard this labor as one of the problems of my life.